

Implementation of Medicare CAHPS® Fee-for-Service Survey:
Data Collection—Final Report for the 2003 Survey

Summary

Background and Purpose: This report details the data collection procedures and results from the 2003 Medicare CAHPS® Fee-for-Service (MFFS CAHPS) survey, discusses the effectiveness of changes made to the data collection protocol for 2003 based on lessons learned from 2002, and provides recommendations for future years of data collection. (Note: Findings from the survey itself are presented in the report titled *Implementation of Medicare CAHPS® Fee-for-Service Survey—Final Report for the 2003 Survey*.) One of the benefits of conducting an annual survey is that future years of data collection can be informed by “lessons learned” from previous years. For example, the decision to use a special delivery courier for the third wave of mailing was based on the results of the experiment conducted during the 2001 MFFS CAHPS survey that showed a significant increase in response to the survey when it was delivered via special delivery than by either US Priority Mail or first class delivery. We also attribute some of the increase in response to better access to resources for contacting and locating beneficiaries, such as the telephone listing provided by the Social Security Administration (SSA).

Methodology and Results: The MFFS CAHPS survey is a self-administered mail survey that offers sample members the option of calling a toll-free number and completing the survey over the phone, as well as completing it by mail. The follow-up data collection effort for nonrespondents to the mail survey includes a telephone follow-up of nonrespondents for whom the researchers had a telephone number and a third wave survey package mailed to nonrespondents for whom the researchers did not have a telephone number. The data collection plan for the mail survey followed the traditional method of making five contacts: 1) advance letter; 2) first survey package; 3) thank you/reminder postcard; 4) second “replacement” package; and 5) second thank you/reminder postcard. In addition, there was a third survey package, which for the first time in 2003 was followed by a third thank you/reminder postcard sent to all remaining sample members.

Four modifications were made to the survey in 2003. First, 700 beneficiaries from the U.S. Virgin Islands were added to the sample. Second, the third wave mailing was sent via a special delivery carrier for two-day delivery, instead of overnight delivery. Third, as mentioned above, an additional thank you/reminder postcard was mailed to all survey respondents following the third wave questionnaire mailing. Finally, to allow the extra postcard adequate time to have an effect, the data collection period was extended an additional two weeks.

Data collection results were tabulated and analyzed. Key findings from this analysis are summarized below:

1. The survey was sent to a stratified random sample of 178,650 non-institutionalized Fee-for-Service beneficiaries in the United States, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.
 - An English version of the survey was sent to 177,450 sample members.
 - A Spanish version of the survey was sent to 1,200 in Puerto Rico.
 - 466 special requests for Spanish language surveys were received from the 177,450 respondents who received the English version.
2. The overall response rate for the 2003 survey was 69.3 percent, which is 1.3 percent lower than the 70.6 percent overall response rate achieved during 2002.
 - However, the overall response rate for the 2003 survey was 1.3 percent higher than the 68.0 percent overall response rate in 2001, and 5.4 percent higher than the 63.9 percent overall response rate in 2000.
 - The 2003 overall response rate varied somewhat among the specific geographic areas from which the randomized sub-samples were drawn, but response in each area was sufficient (300 completed cases per geographic unit) to provide measures of CAHPS composites and rating for all 277 distinct areas, and for each of the 50 U.S. states, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and the District of Columbia.
3. In 2003 the response rate among eligible beneficiaries was lower by one or two percentage points in almost all demographic categories of respondents than it was in 2002.
 - The biggest drop was almost a 25 percent decrease in respondents who categorized themselves as “other or unknown” race.
 - Up until 2003, the number of respondents categorizing themselves as “other or unknown” race had risen.
 - The response rate among sample members in this category jumped from 49.2 percent in 2002 to 66.5 percent in 2001, and rose to 74.2 in 2002, then fell to just 50.9 in 2003.
 - Another decrease was in the percentage of sample members in the age category of 44 or younger—a decrease from 50.3 percent in 2002 to 46.5 percent in 2003.

- Also, there was a decrease in the number of beneficiaries in Puerto Rico who responded to the survey.
 - In past years, there was a steady increase in the number of respondents from Puerto Rico—from 45.6 percent in 2000, to 57.5 percent in 2001, to 59.2 percent in 2002.
 - However, in 2003, the number of respondents from Puerto Rico fell to 55.8 percent.
- 4. In 2003, there was a decrease in response rate in the first wave mailing, the third wave mailing, and the outbound telephone component (i.e., interviewers calling respondents), but slight increases in the response rate in the second wave mailing and the inbound telephone component (i.e., respondents calling interviewers).
 - For 2003, the first wave mailing was a little larger (178,650) than in 2002 (177,950).
 - The first wave mailing response rate was 43.37 percent, compared to 44.86 in 2002.
 - The second wave mailing in 2003 was sent to 56.3 percent of the sample, a few points more than in 2001 and 2002 (approximately 54 percent each), but about 18 percentage points fewer than in 2000 (approximately 74 percent).
 - The 2003 second wave response rate was 12.76 percent, up from 11.79 percent in 2002.
 - In 2003, there were many fewer nonrespondents for whom we could not find telephone numbers, making them eligible for third wave mailing.
 - The 2003 third wave mailing was sent to only 2,666 beneficiaries for whom we had no telephone number, compared with 8,342 in 2002 and 17,961 in 2001.
 - The reason for this decrease is due to the fact that we were able to trace more telephone numbers in 2003.
 - We found telephone numbers for 95.91 percent of the entire sample in 2003, compared with 94.29 percent in 2002, due to a large extent to the reliability of SSA's telephone lists.

- The percentage of surveys completed by inbound telephone rose slightly to 1.77 percent in 2003, from 1.32 percent in 2002.
 - This increase is the result of streamlining the procedures so that the inbound telephone agents could administer the survey immediately while the caller was on the line, instead of having to call back at a later time to complete the interview, as was the process in 2000. This change was implemented in 2001.
- In 2003, the percent of sample to the outbound nonresponse follow-up rose to 38.4 percent, from 35.2 percent in 2002, and 30.7 percent in 2001.
 - Outbound telephone response rates had increased from 2000 to 2002, consistent with the overall response rates observed in those years.
 - However, the outbound telephone response rate dropped to 9.63 percent of all respondents in 2003, compared with 10.26 in 2002.
 - It is likely that the recent implementation of the Federal “Do Not Call Registry” and all the publicity surrounding it have had a negative impact on the outbound telephone response rates, even though the Registry does not apply to surveys. Researchers have noted similar decreases in response rates in other outbound calling projects since implementation of the Registry. It is likely that many people who had put their names on the Registry simply hung up the phone before interviewers could explain that surveys are exempt from the prohibition since they are not selling anything.